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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in South Vietnam
(As of 1300 EST, 26 March)

1. Despite the government's conciliatory gesture yesterday, continuing agitation in South Vietnam today for the first time featured a street demonstration in Saigon and a potentially explosive incident in I Corps involving US personnel. However, press reports indicate that ranking members of the Buddhist clergy are to meet in Saigon tomorrow, possibly to consider the government's recent concession.

2. According to the press, Thich Thien Minh, a ranking member of the Buddhist hierarchy, addressed a gathering of about 10,000 persons at the Buddhist Institute in Saigon during the evening hours of 26 March (Saigon time). After describing the country's deteriorating economic and social conditions and reiterating standard demands for a civilian government and national elections, he urged the crowd to take no action until after tomorrow's meeting of the Buddhist clergy. Minh also stated that a communique would be issued on the results of the meeting.

3. Nevertheless, one group at the conclusion of the meeting attempted to organize the crowd into a demonstration and began a march to the central market place. According to the US Embassy, a group of 1,000 persons reached the market area, but quickly dwindled to several hundred. Police were deployed nearby but did not attempt to interfere. The embassy also reported that there was no evidence of violence and that the situation appeared to be quieting down by 11:00 PM (Saigon time).

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4. In a nationwide radio broadcast about two hours earlier, Premier Ky had stated that current unrest was due to an unfortunate misunderstanding, and went on to explain that there was no real difference between the aspirations of the military leaders and the people. Ky declared that the military government hoped to establish democratic structures, but that it needed an (unspecified) period of time. He stated that this period of time would be shortened if the people remained calm and united. There was apparently no reference in his speech to any specific methods the government planned to use in making the transition to civilian government.

5. Elsewhere in Saigon today, militant Roman Catholic leader Reverend Hoang Quynh publicly denounced the military regime and called for the return of a civilian government. Quynh, a leader of northern refugee Catholics, voiced his desire for a civilian government with representatives from each of the country's main religious groups. He added, however, that most of the Buddhists were opposed to this arrangement.

6. In Hue, a potentially explosive incident was touched off today when US Marines tore down an anti-US, English language sign. The city "struggle committee" quickly issued a strong ultimatum which threatened US installations in the area if its demands were not met. After some discussion, an apology by the senior US military advisor in the area apparently forestalled any immediate action by the local student leaders. In a later broadcast over the municipal radio in Hue, the struggle committee announced the US apology but then broadcast an open telegram to President Johnson protesting the incident. The committee also announced that a rally would be held at some future date to discuss the incident. In addition, earlier reports have indicated that a mass rally is planned for tomorrow in Hue.

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